

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4306

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 13306

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, IN

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AND STRIFE IN INDIA

1. 1974 HAS ALREADY PROVEN A VIOLENCE-SCARRED YEAR. DURING JANUARY - APRIL THE BLOODY GUJARAT UPHEAVALS RESULTED IN 90 DATHS AND 209 INJURIES BY OFFICIAL COUNTRY. THE ONGOING BIHAR DISTURBANCES HAVE CLAIMED OVER 40 LIVES SO FAR. ACCORDING TO AN EMBASSY STUDY BASED ON PRESS REPORTS AND OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS, 194 PERSONS WERE KILLED AND 629 INJURED IN ABOUT 400 POLICE FIRINGS IN THE COUNTRY BETWEEN JANUARY 1 AND AUGUST 31, 1974.

2. EARLIER THIS YEAR WE ANTICIPATED (NEW DELHI 8818 AND 12095) THAT FOOD SHORTAGES AND RISING PRICES WOULD CONTINUE TO INFLECT SEVERE HARDSHIPS ON INDIA'S LOWER CLASSES, PARTICULARLY IN URBAN AND VERY REMOTE RURAL AREAS, AND RESULT IN A WIDENING PATTERN OF VIOLENCE AND UNRESTS. DURING THESE LEAN MONTHS BEFORE THE KHARIF CROP IS HARVESTED IN THE LATE FALL, THIS RTREND HAS PICKED UP. STUDENT UNREST IN MUCH OF NORTHERN INDIA, PUBLIC RESENTMENT AGAINST CORRUPTION AND ATTEMPTS BY OPPOSITION PARTIES TO MOBILIZE DISCONTENT HAVE PROVIDED THE ENERGY. SEVERE FOOD SHORTAGES ALREADY EXIST IN PARTS OF WEST BENGAL, ORISSA AND GUJA-
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RAT. AS WE REPORTED IN OUR 12095, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE

GOVERNMENT TO KEEP SUFFICIENT FOOD ON THE RAILS TO AVERT REAL, IF LOCALIZED, STARVATION CONDITIONS IN ISOLATED AREAS.

3. OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS VIOLENCE RELATING TO FOOD SHORTAGES HAVE BEEN SLOWLY INCREASING, BUT IT IS STILL VERY SCATTERED AND LIMITED. IN WEST BENGAL, ANDHRA PRADESH, RAJASTHAN, GUJARAT AND U.P. THE PRESS HAS REPORTED SEVERAL DOZEN FOOD DEMONSTRATIONS, LOOTING OF PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL GRAIN STORAGE FACILITIES AND TRAINS TRANSPORTING FOODGRAINS. CONGEN CALCUTTA REPORTS THAT THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST FOUR CASES OF MOB ATTACKS ON RAILWAY FOOD TRAINS BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 8 AND SEPTEMBER 26. ACCORDING TO CALCUTTA RAILWAY SOURCES, SINCE SEPTEMBER 26 ALL FOOD TRAINS HAVE BEEN GUARDED BY ARMED MEMBERS OF THE RAILWAY PROTECTION FORCE, AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO INCIDENTS SINCE THEN.

4. J.P. NARAYAN'S BIHAR MOVEMENT MAY POSE A SPECIAL PROBLEM TO MRS. GANDHI AND HER GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER. NARAYAN HAS JUST ENDED A ONE-MONTH LULL BY INITIATING A STATEWIDE GENERAL STRIKE FROM OCTOBER 3-6. ON THE FIRST TWO DAYS, PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE NORTHERN AND NORTHWESTERN PARTS OF THE STATE SPILLED OVER INTO ATTACKS BY MOBS ON GOVERNMENT INSTALLATIONS. SIX PERSONS WERE KILLED AND TWO DOZEN INJURED, INCLUDING 20 POLICEMEN, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL FIGURES. OVER 2,000 HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. RAILWAY TRACKS AND STATIONS WERE THE MAIN TARGETS IN THESE AREAS, AND TRAFFIC ALONG THE MAIN EAST-WEST RAIL LINES WAS SEVERELY INTERRUPTED. IN GENERAL, RURAL AREAS OF THE STATE WERE UNAFFECTED, BUT INITIAL REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE STRIKE'S OBJECTIVE TO PARALYZE PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL ACTIVITY WAS SUCCESSFUL IN PATNA AND SEVERAL OTHER SMALL TOWNS. IN DELHI, VETERAN POLITICIAN J.P. KRIPALANI, WITH SUPPORT FROM SOME OPPOSITION PARTIES, WILL ATTEMPT TO LAUNCH A BIHAR-TYPE MOVEMENT ON OCTOBER 6 BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER'S HOME.

5. COMMENT: IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN THE TYPE OF VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL UNREST DESCRIBED ABOVE WILL CONTINUE ON THE UPSWING DURING THE MONTHS AHEAD, GIVEN THE PROSPECTS FOR FOOD SHORTAGES, HIGHER PRICES FOR ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES AND STUDENT UNREST. THE VIRTUAL ABSENCE OF A COMMON, TRANSREGIONAL CATALYTIC AGENT TO LINK DISTURBANCES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, THE WELL-TESTED ABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF COMPARTMENTALIZE AND THEN

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ASSUAGE CRISES, AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ENLARGE, COORDINATE AND EQUIP ITS POLICE AND PARAMILITARY FORCES OVER THE PAST SEVEN MONTHS, HOWEVER, ENSURE THAT BREAKDOWNS IN LAW AND ORDER WILL BE

CONTAINED.
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